Import curbs on foreign farm goods

318. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India would have to remove import curbs on foreign farm goods within a few years, being a signatory to the World Trade Organisation;

(b) if so, the main items of farm goods that will become vulnerable to foreign competition;

(c) whether any plan has been mooted out to protect the interests of the India farmers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (DR. S. VENUGOPALACHARI): (a) and (b) India has recently presented to WTO a plan for the elimination of all residual Quantitative Restrictions on imports, including those of agricultural products, which are currently maintained for balance of payments purposes. It is proposed to remove in a phased manner the Quantitative Restrictions on several agricultural items such as apple, oranges, cabbage, grapes etc.

(c) and (d) It is the intention of the Government to remove the Quantitative Restrictions in a phased manner so that the interests of the farmers in the country are protected to the maximum extent. Simultaneously, efforts are being made for improving productivity of Indian agriculture in order to face competition from abroad. Besides, there are safeguards in the form of tariff, bound rates, anti-dumping and countervailing measures to prevent damage to domestic production through surge in imports, which are consistent with the WTO frame-work.

Role of Agriculture costs and price commission

319. SHRI SANJAY DALMIA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the role of Agriculture Costs and Price Commission in regard to fixing prices of foodgrains;

(b) whether the Commission is functioning properly;

(c) whether Government are ignoring the recommendations of the Commission;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(e) the steps taken by Government to provide remunerative prices to the farmers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (DR. S. VENUGOPALACHARI): (a) The role of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) is to make recommendations to the Government on Agricultural price policy on a regular basis. The Commission is required to evolve a balanced and integrated price structure in the perspective of the overall needs of the economy and with due regard to the interests of producers and consumers.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) and (d) No, Sir. The recommendations of the CACP serve as the basis for formulating the agricultural price policy and these are generally accepted. However, the Government at times improves upon the recommendations made by the CACP keeping in view the developments subsequent to submission of the report.

(e) The main objective of the Government's price policy for agricultural produce is aimed at ensuring remunerative prices to the growers for their produce with a view to encourage higher investment and production; and to safeguard the interests of the consumers by making available supplies at reasonable prices. Government announces each season the minimum support price for 24 major agricultural commodities and organises purchase operations through public and cooperative agenies such as Food Corporation of India, Jute Corporation of